

Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

13 February 1985

The Philippines' Imelda Marcos:
What Would She Do In Power? [redacted]

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Summary

Although Imelda Marcos is not the most likely candidate to succeed her husband, she is determined to do so and has a fair chance. We believe a regime led by her, however, would be besieged by substantial political opposition from the outset. Under these circumstances, she would probably resort frequently to the use of presidential powers to legislate by decree and detain suspected "subversives." She almost certainly would be tempted to crack down on the press and the moderate opposition, endangering the modest political reform that has occurred in the Philippines since the lifting of martial law in 1981. Should widespread disorder erupt following a successful bid for the presidency, she would be more likely than her husband was to impose martial law. [redacted]

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Because Mrs. Marcos would not rule by popular mandate, she would be forced to build power bases within the military and ruling party in order to secure her tenure. Her base of support would include General Ver--currently on leave as Armed Forces Chief of Staff. She also would be beholden to the financial and political resources of members of her husband's inner circle, such as her brother--Ambassador to the US Benjamin Romualdez--and agricultural magnate Eduardo Cojuangco. Their influence would probably moderate some of her more radical ideas on foreign policy, but bilateral relations with the United States would be at best strained. [redacted]

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This Memorandum was prepared by [redacted] Southeast Asia Division, Office of East Asian Analysis with a contribution from [redacted] Office of Central Reference. Information available as of 8 February 1985 was used in its preparation. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to Chief, Southeast Asia Division, OEA, [redacted]

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A Serious Presidential Contender

Imelda Marcos's continued tight control over both access to President Marcos and information on his health affords her an inside track when the race to succeed Marcos intensifies. Mrs. Marcos's maneuverings during her husband's health crisis have signalled to most Philippine observers her desire to succeed Marcos, despite her public disavowals of any presidential ambition. Her recent efforts to refurbish her public image include employing journalists to cover her daily activities, receiving ambassadors in Marcos's absence, and taking a highly visible role in high level government meetings. In our judgment she will continue to take advantage of Marcos's isolation and medical condition to further improve her position. [REDACTED]

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Mrs. Marcos commands significant financial and political resources--the US Embassy estimates that she is a billionaire--that she can use in her bid to secure and--if successful--retain the presidency. She has in the past used her positions as Minister of Human Settlements and Governor of Metro-Manila to try to build a national political power base. We estimate, for instance, that the Ministry of Human Settlements may through its many programs indirectly control 20 percent of the national budget. Although her efforts at the local level have not yielded the extensive support she presumably has hoped for, her liberal use of ministry monies nevertheless has allowed her to amass considerable political debts. [REDACTED]

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She is also likely to depend on the financial and political resources of her brother and on others in Marcos's inner circle such as Eduardo Cojuangco. US Embassy reporting shows that Romualdez is a shrewd politician and his cunning would play an important role in her administration. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Cojuangco pledged his support for her in August 1983 when Marcos's last health crisis sparked a round of succession jockeying within his inner circle. [REDACTED]

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Imelda Marcos has numerous detractors, and several factors could prevent her from retaining power through the end of a six-year presidential term. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Mrs. Marcos lacks her husband's political cunning--a skill that would be essential in maneuvering amidst the chaos that we believe will accompany Marcos's death. Furthermore, much of the power that she now commands emanates from her position as Marcos's wife and many Philippine observers believe that she will command little respect or fear in Marcos's absence. [REDACTED]

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Mrs. Marcos's popularity, moreover, has seriously eroded since the assassination of Benigno Aquino; many Filipinos believe

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that she may have been responsible for the incident. Her political stock continued to plummet when she failed to deliver votes in Manila--the ruling party won only 5 of 21 seats--for the party in National Assembly elections last May.

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A Probable Agenda

Because Mrs. Marcos's presidency would face widespread opposition from key interest groups in the Philippines--including the business community, the church, and elements of the military and ruling party--we believe that she would begin her tenure in a weak position.* An unpopular choice among most government officials--particularly with the technocrats, such as Prime Minister Virata, and independent ministers such as Foreign Minister Tolentino--her first task would be to tighten her control over the government. We believe, nonetheless, that many within the government would initially choose to cast their lot with Mrs. Marcos rather than take their chances with a fragmented moderate opposition. We suspect that Mrs. Marcos's first priority would be to strike deals with these leading government officials and move against others who openly oppose her.

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In an effort to secure military support, we suspect that Mrs. Marcos also would move to reinstate General Ver as Armed Forces Chief of Staff or reaffirm his position if he already has been reinstated. She would probably count on the support of key senior officers with whom Ver reportedly has established close personal ties since becoming Chief of Staff in 1981. In addition, Ver has control over the military's extensive intelligence apparatus. In exchange for his support, which we assume would be forthcoming, Mrs. Marcos might grant Ver more autonomy in the military--Marcos thus far has personally approved all major personnel changes that Ver has made. Through Ver, Mrs. Marcos probably would conduct a purge in the military in order to consolidate her control. The longstanding enmity between Mrs. Marcos and General Ramos because he has in the past refused to put personal loyalty to Marcos above his professionalism--suggests that he would be quickly retired.

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*In our judgment, Mrs. Marcos's best chance to become president would be in an election managed by her husband. Her own financial resources would put her in good position to make a bid. We believe, however, that she commands insufficient support within the ruling party to win a nomination on her own merits and would have to rely on Marcos to secure the party's nod.

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Others who would probably be removed or find their powers greatly diminished under Mrs. Marcos's administration include key members of the current cabinet. She has vehemently opposed the growing influence of the technocrats and has frequently led vicious attacks against Virata and Central Bank Governor Jose Fernandez. We suspect Mrs. Marcos would probably remove both Virata and Fernandez and would greatly reduce the influence of other technocrats. She would probably turn instead to Marcos's business associates, such as sugar baron Roberto Benedicto and agricultural magnate Eduardo Cojuangco for advice on economic and financial matters. []

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Similarly, Tolentino has been an outspoken critic of Mrs. Marcos in the past and recently won out over Mrs. Marcos's brother--Ambassador to the US Benjamin Romualdez--in a contest to become Foreign Minister. We believe that Tolentino would not back Mrs. Marcos and would offer his resignation upon her election rather than wait to be dismissed. []

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On the other hand, some high level officials who have been the target of some of Mrs. Marcos's most vociferous attacks might survive a reshuffle. Defense Minister Enrile, for example--who has emerged as a potential presidential contender during Marcos's health crisis--reportedly is heading a rival faction in the ruling party and is expected to challenge Mrs. Marcos for the party's nomination. We believe that Enrile would seek to mend fences with Mrs. Marcos while biding his time for a future bid for power. For her part, Mrs. Marcos would probably welcome Enrile back into the fold, if for no other reason than to coopt his faction within the party. []

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It is impossible to say who Mrs. Marcos might choose to replace the cabinet ministers who would fall under her rule. We do know, however, that, unlike Marcos's advisers--who have often presented him with alternative views on policy issues--Mrs. Marcos's loyalists in the Ministry of Human Settlements have tended to flatter her and readily submit to her opinions. Sychophancy would be the order of the day and we suspect that her cabinet would be unwilling to voice views that differ from hers. []

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In addition, Mrs. Marcos's relationship with the legislature would be stormy. The National Assembly has proven a more independent body since its election in May 1984 and, in Marcos's absence, the breakdown of ruling party discipline could make it difficult for Mrs. Marcos to get legislation passed. The Assembly--for example--levelled stiff bipartisan criticism at Mrs. Marcos's Ministry of Human Settlements earlier this year, including charges of misappropriation of funds. []

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Changes in Policy

Because Imelda Marcos's government would have shallow roots from the outset, we believe her use of certain presidential

powers would tend to be heavyhanded. She would probably resort to the frequent use of the emergency power to legislate by decree and to detain suspected "subversives." She also would not hesitate to crack down on the press and detain large numbers of opposition and business leaders. If she believed it necessary, moreover, Mrs. Marcos would be more likely than her husband was to impose martial law. [redacted]

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On balance, Mrs. Marcos--preoccupied with remaining in power--seems an unlikely candidate to address key concerns that threaten long-term stability in the Philippines. She has been a harsh critic of the recently concluded IMF-led rescheduling negotiations, suggesting that the rescue package would be at serious risk under her administration. If her tenure as Minister of Human Settlements is any guide, IMF restrictions on government spending and the size of the budget deficit, for example, would quickly fall by the wayside. In addition, the US Embassy says that Philippine Government officials who are studying structural problems in the economy--such as reform in the agricultural and financial sectors--have decided to steer clear of Mrs. Marcos's personal interests in order to avoid a confrontation. We believe that her views on economic policy--which as best as we can determine are naive and poorly defined--are unlikely to alter significantly should she come to power. We would be pessimistic about the prospects for structural reform under her administration. [redacted]

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Similarly, her rebuke of Defense Minister Enrile at a recent party caucus for airing concern over the growing communist insurgency suggests that she does not take the threat seriously and would not move to bolster the counterinsurgency effort. With General Ver back as Chief of Staff, moreover, modest reform taking place under Ramos's tenure as Acting Chief would be tenuous and promotions within the military would continue to be given for political reasons. [redacted]

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Mrs. Marcos does not view the benefits of the close relationship between the United States and the Philippines as Marcos has, and we suspect that her policy would probably reflect closer ties to countries such as the Soviet Union. She reportedly views US-Philippine relations as one-sided to the benefit of the United States. She has also promoted cultural ties between the Philippines and the Soviet Union in the past. [redacted]

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[redacted] the Soviet Union is looking to capitalize on its ties with Mrs. Marcos and has recently increased its efforts to court her. [redacted]

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Appendix
Could She Come To Power?

Imelda Marcos--a highly unpopular choice among most ruling party leaders should she make a bid to succeed her husband--is far from the most likely succession candidate. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] In addition, she has grown increasingly unpopular in the countryside, and would be hard pressed to conjure up grass roots support for her candidacy. [REDACTED]

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On the other hand, Marcos's insistence on keeping the succession mechanism weak while not designating a successor assures that a vacuum will develop following his departure from the scene. During that period of uncertainty, we believe Mrs. Marcos might succeed in building coalitions within the ruling party among leaders who fear that they may be left out of the power equation. [REDACTED]

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Mrs. Marcos also has other assets that could facilitate her bid for the party's nomination. The current speaker of the National Assembly--who would act as caretaker president and call elections within 60 days if Marcos died--is a longtime associate of Mrs. Marcos [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] we believe he may be willing to manipulate the election schedule in her favor. For example, both the moderate opposition and ruling party would find it difficult to prepare for elections called two weeks after Marcos's departure. Mrs. Marcos, however, would know Marcos's health status and could be prepared for a quick election. General Ver's support would also make her a more formidable candidate in the eyes of ruling party members. To be certain, however, an election won by Mrs. Marcos almost certainly would be marked by widespread fraud and violence. [REDACTED]

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If Imelda Marcos moved to seize control of the government--a much less likely scenario in our judgment--she would almost certainly depend on General Ver's support. We believe it is far from clear, however, that Ver's personal ties to key military commanders would translate into support on behalf of Imelda Marcos for an extraconstitutional bid for power. In any case, Mrs. Marcos's hold on power under these conditions would be extremely tenuous and she probably would face immediate challenges to her rule. At the same time, a move to impose some form of martial law would be certain to split the military, produce widespread public unrest, and result in a rapidly deteriorating peace and order situation. Even so, Mrs. Marcos is quite capable of such a bid given what is at stake for her politically and financially. A variety of indicators in the months ahead could be a prelude to such a development. [REDACTED]

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- Marcos's reinstatement of General Ver as Armed Force Chief of Staff.
- At Mrs. Marcos's urging, a move by Marcos to "crush" factionalism in the military by accepting General Ramos's retirement.
- A presidential decree that allows Mrs. Marcos to act on behalf of Marcos until his "recovery" is completed.
- Marcos leaves the country for medical treatment and designates a caretaker government that includes General Ver.

Typescript: The Philippines's Imelda Marcos:
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Original--OEA/SEA/IB

1--OEA/SEA/ITM

1--CH/OEA/SEAD

1--DC/OEA/SEAD

1--PDB (7F30)

1--C/NIC (7E62)

1--NIO/EA (7E62)

5--CPAS/IMC/CB (7G07)

1--C/PES/DDI (7F24)

1--DDI (7E44)

1--DCI (7D60)

1--DDCI (7D6011)

1--C/DDO/[REDACTED] (3D00)

1--C/DDO/[REDACTED] (5D00)

1--D/OEAA (4F18)

1--Executive Director (7E12)

1--CPAS/ILS (7G215)

1--OEA/NEA (4G43)

1--OEA/CH (4G32)

1--[REDACTED] NIC/Analytical Group (7E47)

1--[REDACTED] C/DO/PPS (3D01)

1--OEA/Research Director (4G48)

1--[REDACTED] ANIO/Economic (7E48)

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Outside:

State:

1--Honorable Paul Wolfowitz

1--John Monjo

1--John Maisto

1--Thomas Hubbard

1--Lt. Gen John T. Chain, Jr., USAF

1--Rod Huff

INR:

1--Weaver Gim

1--Alan Kitchens

1--Bob Carroll

1--Corazon Foley

1--Morton Abramowitz

Treasury:

1--Douglas P. Mulholland

1--Bill McFadden

1--Bill Quinn

NSC:

1--Gaston Sigur

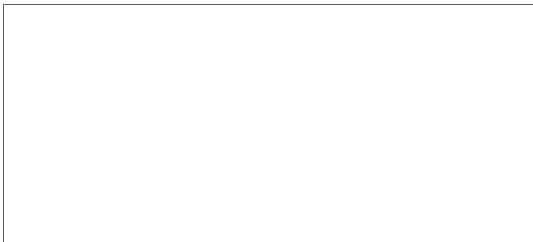
1--Richard Childress

1--David Laux

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DOD:

1--James Kelly
1--Richard Armitage
1--James Martin
1--James Smith
1--Don Eirich
1--Brigadier General Philip Drew
1--Brigadier General Larry Dillingham
1--John Finney



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1--Don Gregg, Office of the Vice President

Commerce:

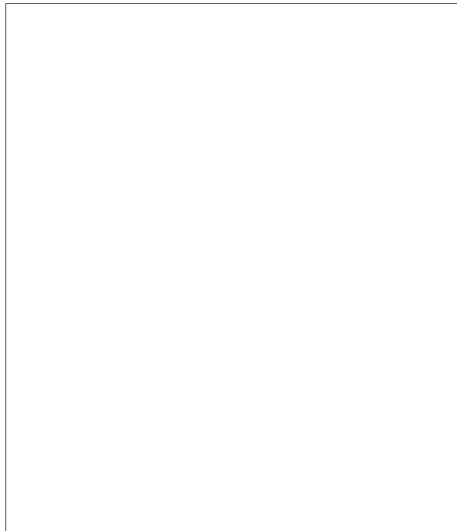
1--Robert Severance
1--Byron Jackson
1--William Brown

Federal Reserve Board:

1--Robert Emery

IPAC:

1--Tim Wright



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